So, what’s the best way to change your bad habits? Replace them with new ones! But why is it that people return to their old habits so often? It’s a result of the neural pathways that get etched into our brains.

This is so we don’t have to stop and think about how to walk before we get up and do it! That’s the good news. The bad news? This applies to ALL habits; even the one that has you routinely eating dessert every night after dinner. However, even though those established pathways never get deleted from our brains, we can in fact change or override them by replacing them with new ones.

**BECOME MORE AWARE OF WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND WHY.**

Author Charles Duhigg explains a simple three-step process that all habits follow. This cycle, known as The Habit Loop, says that each habit consists of three main components:

1. **The Cue/Trigger:** Also known as a trigger, the Cue is an event or situation that initiates a behavior or routine. Experiments have shown that these triggers can be broken down into five main categories:
   - Location
   - Time
   - Emotional state
   - Other people
   - A preceding event

2. **The Routine:** A physical or emotional action (habit) you take when presented with a specific cue or trigger.

3. **The Reward:** The benefit that is associated with the behavior.

When we repeat the pattern of cue, routine, and reward, it becomes more and more automatic. The more it’s repeated, the more it gets etched into our brains. But fortunately, we can disrupt this cycle and rewire our brains for healthier habits by following this four step process.

> “Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going”
> - Jim Ryun

**Step 1 – Identify the Routine**
This is recognizing the actual habit you want to change.

*For example: Let’s say that you have a habit of going for unhealthy vending machine snacks every afternoon at work. This is a routine.*

**Step 2 – Experiment with Rewards**
Rewards are powerful because they satisfy our cravings. However, we’re often not conscious about the cravings that are driving our behaviors. This is why it’s essential that you identify the actual reason why you carry out a specific routine. Start by adjusting your habit in a variety of ways to determine which craving is driving your routine.

*For example: If you hit the vending machine for a candy bar every day at 3:00 are you hungry? Bored? Need a break? And what’s the reward? The cookie itself? The temporary distraction? Socializing with colleagues?*

To figure this out, try doing something else, such as chatting with a coworker or taking a walk around the block. You may find that what you’re really looking for is a break from work, and that talking with a coworker for five minutes or getting some movement is just as satisfying. By experimenting with different rewards, you can isolate what you are actually craving, which is essential in redesigning the habit.
Step 3 – Isolate the Cue/Trigger
Cues are the triggers for our habitual behaviors. Think about it... do you eat at a certain time of day because you are hungry? Because the clock says 5:30? Or because your kids have started eating? Using the five main categories of triggers, write down the answers for these five questions the moment an urge hits. Do this for several days until you recognize the repeating element—this is likely your cue/trigger.

Where are you (location)?  |  What time is it?  |  What’s your emotional state?  
Who else is around (other people)?  |  What event preceded the urge?

Step 4 – Have a Plan
Make a plan to follow a different routine that provides the same reward whenever you experience a cue. You’ll use the feedback from the five questions in Step 3 to isolate the trigger and create a new routine to practice in place of the bad habit.

For example: Every day at 3 pm I will walk a loop around the building.
This activity replaces eating candy with a new routine of getting some movement, which is satisfying what the actual reward is: taking a break from work and decompressing for a bit.

You’ll likely have to work on this daily for several weeks or months before it becomes automatic. Some habits can be more difficult to change, but no matter the behavior, this framework is the best place to start.

To earn your 40 points for this challenge, you must log in to the Alyfe portal (http://bit.ly/Alyfe) and log your minutes of movement (we recommend doing this at least weekly).